Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

ISSN: 0096-3402 (Print) 1938-3282 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rbul20

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To cite this article: Mustafa Kibaroglu (2003) Turkey says no, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 59:4, 22-25, DOI: 10.1080/00963402.2003.11460690

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2003.11460690

Turkey says no

There were good reasons why the United States was unable to persuade Turkey to host U.S. troops headed for Iraq.

By Mustafa Kibaroglu

IN THE DAYS LEADING UP TO THE CONFLICT IN Iraq, the United States and Turkey held extensive negotiations over the U.S. use of Turkish territory in aid of the U.S. campaign. Many Americans assumed that Turkey would quickly agree to any U.S. proposal, and the Turkish government that was formed after last year's November 3 elections was harshly criticized both in and out of the country for "deliberately" drawing out the negotiations with the United States, its most important strategic partner.

The negotiations were conducted along three tracks: political, economic, and military. The Turkish government wanted to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, to which the United States responded affirmatively. Negotiations on the military track concerned where Turkish troops could be deployed and how many would cross the border into northern Iraq without simultaneously disrupting U.S. military operations against Baghdad. Finally, on the economic track, negotiations were aimed at compensating Turkey for the economic damage a U.S.-led campaign against Iraq would cause. An understanding was reportedly reached on the political and military tracks. But negotiations on the economic track never came to fruition, even though there was a great deal of speculation about a $6 billion deal, which would have been much welcomed in Turkey's financial, commercial, and industrial sectors.

Time was probably the most precious asset for both the Turks and the Americans. Turkey was in need of hard currency, having suffered two severe debt crises in the past two years. The United States was concerned about conducting a military campaign in the increasing heat of the Iraqi desert. "Hysteria" might be the word to describe the state of affairs in Ankara in the days leading up to the Iraqi conflict, and there was probably some of the same feeling in the air on Capitol Hill.

Washington's attitude was expressed in political cartoon caricatures of all things Turkish that appeared in the U.S. media, including the *New York Times* and weekly magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*. Some have held that these humiliating caricatures were responsible for the reversal of the attitude of most deputies of the AK Party, which held a two-thirds majority in the Grand National Assembly, and who had tabled the basing resolution before the parliamentarians—and who ultimately blockaded the way to the U.S. troop deployment in Turkey. That would be a very simplistic assessment, however, of why Turkey turned down the U.S. request to use a combination of military bases and air and sea ports, in return for which a number of financial benefits would have flowed from Washington to Ankara.

The essence of disagreement

The seeds of the no vote were actually planted in March 1991, with the creation of the "safe havens" that allowed the return of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds who had fled their country and sought refuge in Turkey and Iran. The Kurds feared being gassed by Saddam's air force, in a repeat of the massacre at Halabja in March 1988, in

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which 5,000 men, women, and children were killed. The so-called no-fly zones, established by the United States—one above the 36th parallel in the Iraqi north, the other below the 32nd (later the 33rd) parallel in the Shiite south—were considered by many Turks as a first step in a long-term U.S. plan to create an independent Kurdish state. Nevertheless, in 1991 permission was granted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly for U.S. aircraft to use Incirlik Air Base near Adana, Turkey, to enforce the no-fly zone, and that permission had been renewed every six months since.

Whenever the United States was accused of using the zone to help create a Kurdish state in northern Iraq, U.S. officials and their representatives in Ankara dismissed Turkish concerns by saying that U.S. authorities had no such intentions, and that they were observing Iraq's territorial integrity.

But Turkish military circles and many of their like-minded political followers were very suspicious. The military, in particular, witnessed the close coordination of U.S. Special Forces and other U.S. agents and the Iraqi Kurdish militia throughout the 1990s. For instance, thousands of Iraqi Kurds went through a special training program on Guam where they learned, among other things, the fundamentals of administering a state bureaucracy, including the military.

This caused deep resentment in the Turkish military. One former Chief of Military Staff, Dogan Güres, recalled in a live *tv8* interview that he had sometimes given orders to check the engines of U.S. helicopters stationed on Turkish soil (and therefore subject to certain restrictions), to see if they were hot, an indication that they had been carrying out missions that did not have the approval of Turkish authorities.

Similarly, former Prime Minister Bülend Ecevit told CNN Türk that he "had sincere doubts about the real intentions of the Americans with regard to the Kurds in Iraq."

But if Turkey had not trusted the Americans on the Kurdish issue since 1991, one may reasonably ask why the National Assembly didn't rescind its approval of the no-fly arrangements, first known as "Operation Provide Comfort I and II," and later as "Operation Northern Watch." As a result of these operations, an independent Kurdish political entity appeared in northern Iraq, becoming over the years a de facto state, with a parliament, ministries, a bureaucracy, a central bank, and its own currency.

There were two reasons for continuing to permit the use of Turkish bases for these operations. One was the fear of a new wave of refugees from Iraq. The second, and maybe more compelling reason, was the implicit approval by successive U.S. administrations of Turkey's sporadic but large-scale cross-border incursions into northern Iraq throughout the 1990s. These operations involved tens of thousands of troops accompanied by air power, in pursuit of Turkey's Kurdish separatists, the PKK terrorists. The establishment of the no-fly zone had also turned northern Iraq into a sanctuary for the PKK, which had been waging a separatist war against Turkey since 1984. Turkey's incursions were much criticized in European circles, but the United States turned a blind eye.

Strained relations

Against this background, it would be naïve to argue that negotiations on the economic track, which were said to deadlock on the amount as well as the method of payment of U.S. aid, determined the fate of the resolution that would pave the way for basing American troops in Turkey.

The deadlock was political. There were public rumors about secret U.S. plans for a Kurdish state, and Zalmay Khalilzad, President George W. Bush's special representative, shuttled between Ankara and northern Iraq in search of a breakthrough. But he could not satisfy Turkish concerns; his Turkish counterparts insisted that the Turks (or Turkomans) in Iraq be included in Iraq's future political restructuring. A political role for the Turkomans was seen as a safety valve—a way to protect Turkey's vital interest in northern Iraq, by means of which efforts to create a Kurdish state could be rendered ineffective.

Turkish policy-makers maintained that Iraq's Turkomans had always been oppressed, whether they lived in Saddam's Iraq (squeezed in between the two no-fly zones), or in Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkish negotiators wanted a political settlement that would enable the Turkomans to be represented in the "new Iraq" commensurate with their population, which was estimated to be roughly 2.5 million—more than double the official figure, which was suspect. But the Kurds were not about to agree to a deal that would elevate the Turkomans to an almost equal status with themselves in the northern provinces, which they claimed to be "unarguably Kurdish."

The non-inclusion of the Turkomans in the meeting of Iraqi opposition groups in the northern city of Sulaimaniya—which took place on March 1, by coincidence the very day the National Assembly

voted on the basing resolution, reinforced the doubts of many deputies. The vote was 264, yes; 250, no; with 19 abstaining. However, the resolution required the approval of an absolute majority.

Before the vote

There were mass anti-war demonstrations in Turkey, as elsewhere, mostly near mosques and universities. From extreme left to extreme right, public opinion was against allowing the United States to deploy troops in Turkey. Nearly every organization opposed the U.S.-led campaign against Iraq—especially the "Islamists," who were mainly constituents of the ruling AK Party. How could the party, they asked, assist in a Christian "crusade," as President Bush had been unlucky enough to call it in the immediate aftermath of September 11, against the Muslim Iraqis?

Yet right before the final vote, the climate among decision-makers seemed to favor U.S. plans to deploy troops in the country. It was believed by the Turkish security elite that the "three-track-deal package" with the United States was the best that could be worked out. By opening its territory to U.S. troops, Turkey would become an active member of the "coalition of the willing" and have a seat at the table around which the future of Iraq would be shaped. Turkey would have the leverage to prevent any development that would lead to an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Turkey would also have a voice in securing proper representation for the Turkomans. In addition, the $6 billion deal, together with other credits, would boost the economy. And the removal of Saddam and the dismantlement of his weapons would add to Turkey's security.

A shock wave

The failure of the basing resolution was unforeseen. In the hours after the vote, on the one side, masses of people cheered, chanted, and celebrated the dismissal of the resolution, some even comparing the vote to Ataturk's defeat of the occupying powers after World War I. In the aftermath, the loss of the $6 billion deal caused few regrets; it was not considered significant compared to the scale of the Turkish economy. As for the Kurdish groups' repugnant war-time behavior in Kirkuk and Mosul, it was soon halted with the arrival of U.S. troops. And Turkey could not have prevented it, anyway. The failed agreement would have allowed Turkey to deploy troops only 20 kilometers into Iraqi territory, but those two cities were more than 100 kilometers away.

On the other side of the spectrum were those who were deeply pessimistic about future relations with the United States. They had welcomed the economic package. Their first reaction was that the U.S. administration would never forgive the Turks and would punish Turkey by obstructing the flow of credits from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. They argued that the disapproval of the resolution was the worst decision in the 80-year history of the Turkish Republic. Not only would the stock market hit rock bottom the next day, but also, they said, currency rates would skyrocket overnight, as a result of which an economy that was already in intensive care would be severely damaged and might even collapse. Besides, they asserted, Turkey would no longer be able to prevent the proclamation of a Kurdish state, which would eventually make territorial claims on Turkey's southeastern Anatolian districts. So far, none of these things have happened, nor are they likely to happen in the foreseeable future.

Turkish-American relations

During the war, President Bush remarked at one point that he "told *the Turks* not to send troops into northern Iraq." No other recent U.S. president would have used such language; his predecessors would have been careful to say "we advised *our Turkish allies*" or "*our Turkish friends.*" But the remark reflected perhaps the stress of conducting a war that had not made a good start, at least in the public eye, rather than a persistent attitude.

As for lasting consequences, the military-strategic significance of Turkey seems likely to be diminished. Iraq will become the forward defense post of the United States for future contingencies in the greater Middle East and a launch pad for power projection in Central Asia, if need be. The United States will maintain large numbers of troops in Iraqi territory for some time to come, and military bases will operate on long-term contracts, all of which will undermine the indispensability of Incirlik and other military installations in Turkey.

Still, U.S. strategists will no doubt bear in mind that the greatest challenge to U.S. security will come from the threat posed by international terrorism. And no military capability—no matter how great—can prevent or deter acts of terrorism. The most important instrument will be reliable intelligence. At

that point, Turkey will be seen again as an invaluable partner, given its location, cultural, religious, and linguistic common denominators with other civilizations in the Eurasian landscape, as well as its centuries-old expertise in military affairs, including intelligence-gathering capabilities.

The U.S. attitude toward the United Nations and toward NATO was much criticized throughout the Iraqi crisis, yet it seems likely that the United States may prefer, in the future, to form ad hoc alliances rather than maintain static and regional alliances. If so, the United States may have to more frequently enter into lengthy negotiations, as it did with Turkey.

In the future, Turkish-American relations will be determined by the scope and content of emerging U.S. policies and Turkey's capability and willingness to collaborate on particular policies as they develop. By the same token, the economic incentives that the United States had used as sweeteners in achieving its politico-military goals may also be considerably affected. ✵

Kashmir, caught in the middle

India and Pakistan will try once more to work it out. The other options are not so good. By Sumit Ganguly

IN THE EARLY HOURS OF MARCH 24, A GROUP of armed men dressed in Indian Army fatigues entered the mountain village of Nadimarg, in Indian-controlled Kashmir. They ordered the village's Hindu inhabitants out of their houses, and then shot those who complied, 24 of 52 villagers, including several women and children. The attack was only the latest in a series of massacres of innocent civilians, especially Hindus, since the eruption of an ethno-religious insurgency in Kashmir in 1989.

Five decades after the collapse of the British colonial empire in South Asia, the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir continues to wrack the region, exacting a depressing toll in lost lives. Kashmir is at the center of a seemingly unrelenting and bitter interstate dispute between India and Pakistan.

The dispute took a sanguinary turn in 1989 after India made a series of clumsy attempts to meld Kashmir into the Indian union, by means both fair and foul. Once the violence began, Pakistan entered the fray and the uprising was transformed from a spontaneous and disorganized movement of disaffected Kashmiris to a well-orchestrated infiltration of Pakistani-trained terrorists. Although some of the insurgents genuinely believe that predominantly Muslim Kashmir is oppressed by Indian rule, they have failed to command the sympathies of much of Kashmir's populace, Muslim or otherwise.

Yet the insurgency drags on. And should it become the focal point of yet another war between India and Pakistan, might that war involve nuclear weapons? Or might the United States play a useful role in seeking a resolution to this crisis?

These questions are hardly trivial. More than 50,000 people have perished in Kashmir since the onset of the insurgency—more than were killed in all four Indo-Pakistani wars combined.

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Slouching toward war

India and Pakistan nearly went to war for a fifth time last year. The catalytic event was the Decem-